DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 360 551 CE 064 339

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TITLE	Do You Have a Vision for Transition?
PUB DATE	14 Jul 93
NOTE	17p.; Keynote address at the Annual Summer Agriscience/Technical Inservice for Agricultural Educators (Lebanon, PA, July 14, 1993).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Agricultural Education; Articulation (Education); Basic Skills; *Educational Change; Educational Trends; Education Work Relationship; Postsecondary Education; *Program Improvement; Secondary Education; *Teacher Role; Transitional Programs; *Vocational Education; *Vocational Education Teachers
IDENTIFIERS	Pennsylvania

ABSTRACT

A review of the issues of "Agricultural Education Magazine" published during the 1982-1983 school year indicates that, even then, the vocational agriculture profession was experiencing considerable change while continuing the long-held philosophy that vocational agriculture programs must include the interrelated components of classroom/laboratory instruction, the Future Farmers of America, and supervised occupational experience. Recent conversations with agriculture teachers indicate that most are simultaneously concerned about the future of agricultural education in public schools and excited about future opportunities to serve different client groups in new ways. Increased calls for accountability in public education mean that agricultural education must find ways to support the growing movement toward helping all students master higher levels of skills without jeopardizing enrollments in agricultural programs. Vocational agriculture teachers must develop a vision for transition and find new ways to accommodate the new realities of society and schools. In Pennsylvania, the transition appears under way in such areas as articulation of secondary and postsecondary programs and tech prep program development. Agriculture teachers must now find new ways to meet the school-to-work transition and community service obligations of the educational system through its student organizations and supervised agricultural experience. (Contains 10 references.) (MN)

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ED 360 551

DO YOU HAVE A VISION FOR TRANSITION?

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Keynote Address at the
Annual Summer Agriscience/Technical Inservice
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Lebanon, Pennsylvania

July 14, 1993

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DO YOU HAVE A VISION FOR TRANSITION?

It is a pleasure to return to Pennsylvania. I want to thank you for the opportunity to participate in your conference. I feel like I have participated in a day of democracy as I listened to the debate regarding FFA issues at your business meeting today. There was considerable disagreement and Cliff Day did an excellent job directing the discussion. I also recall Mr. Day saying that he was simply the messenger, whom you should spare even though you may not like the message. It is good to see Cliff at the banquet tonight. I trust you will extend the same generosity to me.

The message that I would like to share with you focuses on the question: Do you have a vision for transition? I will address this question by looking back, then looking ahead.

Education is in a tremendous time of change; there is no comfort zone. Those who prosper, indeed, those who survive must have a vision of what their future is to be.

The futurist, Joel Barker, in his video tape entitled "The Power of Vision," says: "It is essential that we think about, dream about and ultimately envision our futures." He goes on to say: "Having a positive vision of the future is the most powerful motivator for change that you and I possess" (cited in Klein, 1993, p.7A).

Looking Back

There are those in the ag ed profession who would prefer to "go back to the future," as a way to envision what changes are needed. Carl Hurley, the Kentucky humorist, tells the story about how we are not afraid of change, we are afraid of the unknown.

He tells about growing up way out in the country on a hillside farm with poor land situated on a 45 degree angle. For a cow to survive on the property, it had to have a mouth the size of a number 3 washtub and graze at 30 miles an hour. Hurley recalls how the people got so excited when they heard they were going to get electricity.

One long-time resident got excited in opposition to getting the electricity. The fellow said when they get electricity then they would get electric stoves and all those other electrical gadgets. And he felt that would be bad because people would eat enough electricity in their cornbread alone to kill them.

There are those in ag ed that fear change. To them back to the future would mean simply finding the right kind of students, preferably from farms, that could learn a modernized form of production agriculture. The danger in this approach is revealed in a marketing adage that states: "Those most successful in the past are most likely to fail in the future, because they rely upon old strategies to solve new and different problems."

I last taught vocational agriculture ten years ago this month. Have the problems of the profession changed? What were the problems ten years

ago? Perhaps more importantly, what was the vision for "vocational" agriculture?

To answer these questions, I went to my attic and found old issues of The Agricultural Education Magazine. Among the issues which I wanted to examine were the issues for the 1982-83 school year. Consequently, I reviewed Volume 55, the issues of July 1982 through June 1983.

Vol. 55 contained 138 articles and 15 editorials. I found that I had coauthored two of the articles (Harmon & Doepkens, 1983; Harmon & Westerberg, 1982). Also among the articles were results of the first national opinionnaire on vocational-technical agricultural education. Among the questions asked in the survey was "What are the major problems currently facing vocational-technical agricultural education?" The results were as follows (Lee, 1982a):

Problem	Number Respondents	Rank
Funding for local programs	196	1
Excessive job demands on teachers	162	2
Providing supervised occupational experiences	115	3
Lack of school administrative support	105	4
Shortage of teachers	98	5
Lack of student interest	67	6
Student discipline	47	7

Only two of the 251 persons responding said an "attack on 12-month programs" was a major problem. Almost two-thirds (64.2 percent) of the

respondents gave the profession a grade of B; 17.1 percent an A; and 18.3 percent a C.

Are the problems different today? A review of titles of the 138 articles and 15 editorials suggest the profession in the 1982-83 school year was experiencing considerable change, as well as continuing the long held philosophy that a quality vo-ag program must include the interrelated components of classroom/laboratory instruction, the FFA, and supervised occupational experience.

Here are some titles of articles that might reflect a vision for vo-ag in 1982-83:

Adversity and Improvement: Do They Go Together?

Declining Resources: Determination Not Despair

Quality Classroom Instruction--A Must for Vocational Agriculture

Quality Instruction--Hope for the Future

Economic Literacy Through Agricultural Education

Evaluation is the Key to Improvement

Horticultural Mechanics: An Unanswered Need

Entrepreneurship in Horticulture: Should I Start My Own Business

Rural America is Growing Again

Questions for Beginning Teachers

Leadership for Adult Agriculturists

Business and Industry--The Untapped Resources

Improving Cooperative Efforts Between High School and Postsecondary Programs

Achieving Articulation in Vocational Agriculture

Using Student Organizations in Agricultural Education

Publicizing a Year-Round Program

SOE-The Center of Your Summer Program

Eliminate Your Summer Program

The SOE-FFA Relationship

Alternative Approaches to SOE

Record Books Teach Basic Skills

Supervising the Total Vocational Agriculture Program

Urban Programs: Success at Last?

Urbanization and Agricultural Occupational Opportunities

Clearly, the profession was in transition. The traditional vision was being challenged. Some in the profession were even suggesting that the name of the student organization should be changed from Future Farmers of America, when almost 80 percent of the persons responding to the national opinionnaire disagreed that the name should be changed (Lee, 1982b). Seven names were suggested by those advocating the name change. Of course, the name was changed in recent years to be simply FFA, not one of the seven suggestions back in 1982. Obviously, the transition from tradition can be difficult.

Looking back, it appears the profession was highly apathetic toward change. After all, 98 percent of the 13,000 persons in the profession who were sent the national opinion survey did not respond. Only eight people in Pennsylvania responded, and that was a better response than by the profession in most states.

One could argue that in 1982-83 the change efforts of the profession were primarily in response to declining enrollments and rapid technological changes in the agricultural industry. Simply finding more and better students

to learn the hands-on skills to enter a "high-tech" agricultural industry, particularly production agriculture, would have fulfilled the dream that many in the profession had for vocational agriculture.

This dream, however, in my opinion, failed to recognize the tremendous change that would be expected of the entire educational system. The report A Nation at Risk was released in 1983 and soon to follow was the passage of numerous education reform bills by legislatures throughout the United States.

The theme for the December 1985 issue of The Agricultural Education Magazine was "Future Programs of Agricultural Education." In writing his last editorial as editor of the Magazine, Dr. Larry Miller of The Ohio State University labeled the profession as being stoically indifferent to innovation. Miller (1985) commented:

> Are we as willing to be the recipients of, as we are to be the dispensers of change? I perceive that we are not. We teach students to accept challenges, to dare and to take calculated risks; but we seldom do ourselves. (p.3)

He likened the profession to a boat afloat in a tributary, rather than a stream, that is not in the main waterway of education. Miller's view was that the profession was not willing to break from tradition.

Educational reform in the states moved ahead, as the profession sought direction for, some would argue, its survival. The "Future of Agricultural Education in the Secondary Schools" was the theme of the October

1987 issue of The Agricultural Education Magazine. The issue contained a preview of what the Committee on Agricultural Education in the Secondary Schools, which was appointed by the National Academy of Sciences, might recommend as a vision for the future of the profession.

Most of the articles in the issue were written by members of the Committee. They wrote about the barriers to change, about the falacy of trying to place old wine in new bottles, about changing the way we think, and about shaping the future of vocational agriculture. You are probably very familiar with the final recommendations of the National Academy of Science's committee on agricultural education. Dr. Donald Evans of Penn State University served on the committee.

The editor of The Agricultural Education Magazine at the time was Dr. Blannie Bower, now a professor of agricultural education at Penn State. His editorial maintained that the profession should "Capitalize on Strengths." He suggested that agricultural educators should emulate a philosophy shared by world renowned military leaders and great coaches (like Joe Paterno, I assume): "Winners operate from positions of strength and losers operate from positions of weakness" (Bowen, 1987, p.3).

Looking Ahead

Looking back on the profession was interesting. Now let's look ahead. I have probably talked to 15 agriculture teachers at this conference today. All seemed concerned about the future of agricultural education in the public schools. Many seemed excited about the future opportunities to serve a different clientele of students in new ways.

You should not feel threatened by what you are, but excited about what you can become. If you are to move from a tributary to the main waterway of public education, you must envision how you compliment the national issue of results! More so now than ever before, accountability for public education will mean the system must show results in student achievement.

The integration of academic and vocational education must be a complimentary partnership, not a competitive struggle for students, a struggle which too often results in students with very low academic ability being placed in the agricultural education program. I reviewed the findings of a Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) study which examined the basic skills attained by vocational students in the SREB pilot sites in 13 states (Southern Regional Education Board, 1988). The students scored very low in the area of science. To my surprise, agricultural education students also scored low in science. And agricultural education is advocated as an applied science. Indeed, in some states students get science credit for completing the agricultural education program.

The reality is agricultural science teachers cannot teach modern agricultural content to students with low levels of basic academic skills. The real issue is transition. How can the agricultural education profession support the movement in most states that all students master higher levels of basic skills, without jeopardizing the enrollment and perhaps survival of the agricultural program? The profession must become part of the solution to helping students master basic academic skills. Ultimately, this effort will also show positive results in the level of agricultural skills that the students can learn.

Over three years ago a vocational education professor at West Virginia Institute of Technology and I conducted a study to examine the basic skills attainment of vocational students (Browning & Harmon, 1990). The results showed that the majority of vocational students scored low on the state's 11th-grade Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills. Moreover, the agriculture students also looked more like trade and industrial students, with more interests in mechanics than science.

Has the agricultural education curriculum become heavy in shop-related mechanics at the expense of reinforcing the basic science concepts and principles that serve as the foundation of agriculture as an applied science? Have the production ag programs become "shop programs"?

What happened to the problem solving approach to instruction that taught the mind and the hands the basic principles and applications of science? Has agricultural education somehow come to mean vocational training rather than vocational education?

Recent findings of cognitive science support your long held belief of learning by doing. The academic achievement of your students will likely be the results by which your program is measured as a success or failure in the educational system.

While the outcome-based education issue is being hotly debated, and perhaps in no state more than in Pennsylvania, the issue of results will likely prevail. Regardless of what students are to learn, or what standards of performance become acceptable, the general public will expect the educational system to show results for the dollars invested. Education must

compete vigorously for limited resources, and without evidence of positive results, we will win few battles in the halls of Congress, in the state legislatures, or in the living rooms of the American people.

Many in the profession argue that all students in grades k-12 could benefit from agricultural education. Is this argument adhered to in delivering the program? How has the program changed to serve a rural America that has undergone enormous transition in the last decade? Can changes be made that clearly demonstrate how agricultural sciences contribute to the total education of all students? Few people will ever believe that 20 percent of the American workforce is involved in ag-related occupations unless the vision for agricultural education is broadened considerably.

I listened to the two legislators who spoke at your business meeting earlier today. They stressed how important it was to be able to "count votes" in attempting to gain the support needed from the right legislators to pass a bill. Their comments led to the conclusion that agricultural educators must develop some relationships with urban legislators if they want to be successful in getting their issues addressed by the legislature. I hope you listened carefully to what they said.

Your lobbyist, Fred Brown, knows well how true the statements by the two legislators were regarding the need to develop relationships with non-traditional supporters of agriculture. It is no different in West Virginia. The Commissioner of Agriculture could receive every vote cast by farmers in the state and not have a chance of winning the election. The candidate for Commissioner must now appeal to those voters who are concerned about food safety, natural resources and the environment, urban horticultural

issues, gardening, rural development (which means much more than farming) and the many other issues which relate to agriculture and the duties of the Commissioner's office.

The question is not whether you must change to accommodate the new realities of our society and schools. The question is do you have a vision for transition? For many of you the answer is a resounding yes! You have changed both the content and the delivery of the agricultural education program in recent years. And some of you are truly bringing a new era of opportunities in agriculture to students in the public schools.

I learned of the many visionary changes which are occurring in Pennsylvania agriculture programs from listening to many of you earlier today. The content of programs is changing to include modern topics such as food science, biotechnology, hydroponics, tissue culture, and aquaculture. Innovative applications of computers are being incorporated into programs. The program is also starting to focus on environmental and other social issues.

Elimination of the double period requirement is encouraging more flexible scheduling needed to serve a broader, and more diverse, clientele of students. Offering agriculture courses using the satellite-delivered distance learning approach is under experimentation. Alternative approaches to supervised agricultural experiences for students are being explored and the list goes on and on.

The transition appears underway in Pennsylvania. Will the profession build upon its past strengths in articulating secondary and postsecondary programs and see opportunities in the Tech Prep movement? Given the

tremendous technological advancements in the agricultural industry, surely no one still sees the high school ag program as "terminal" education for persons choosing to enter most occupations in the agricultural industry.

Education beyond high school but of less than the baccalaureate degree will be needed to fulfill the role of technicians in the agricultural industry. In addition, how can some agricultural courses become essential as preparation for environmental and other occupations, without the student taking the whole ag program?

You should be cautious not to become embattled in internal turf wars between secondary and postsecondary programs. Both the students and the industry lose, and they will likely find ways to meet their needs without your programs. It is also likely that we will see more integrated, interdisciplinary kinds of programs in the future. If the evidence shows that such programs best prepare students for success after high school, programs which attempt to remain independent will likely be labeled self-serving and targeted for extinction.

Both the student organization and supervised agricultural experience components of your program should serve students well as we look for ways to fulfill the school-to-work transition and community service obligations of the educational system. This does not mean, however, that old wine in new bottles will serve the new clientele of students in rural and urban America. The FFA's Buildings Our American Communities program and the innovative approaches to supervised agricultural experiences appear highly promising.

Conclusion

Perhaps, as one author (Russell, 1983) suggested over ten years ago in The Agricultural Education Magazine, adversity and improvement go together. You in this room must not allow apathy to overshadow the tremendous strengths that your profession has for meeting the educational needs of students in the 21st century. The profession's leadership must demonstrate the "tough love" and intestinal fortitude required to make agricultural education a viable part of the total educational system.

Teachers of agriculture must be both the profession's greatest critic and the profession's greatest advocate. After all, it will be teachers of agriculture who must implement the vision of changes needed to serve future generations of students in the public schools.

Develop collectively an accepted and shared vision for the profession. Then confront the political, social, and economical realities of the times with a vision of rational experimentation and a commitment to attaining results of high achievement for all students. Dream a little and expect a lot of yourself and your profession. Do not feel threatened by what you are but excited by what you can become! Ten years from now someone may again ask: Do you have a vision for transition?

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